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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PRETORIA 004166

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DEPT FOR AF/S

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [KDEM](#) [SF](#)

SUBJECT: ZUMA CAMP CONFIDENT IN LEAD UP TO POLOKWANE  
CONFERENCE

REF: A. PRETORIA 3829 AND PREVIOUS

[1](#)B. PRETORIA 4088

[1](#)C. PRETORIA 4157

[1](#)D. PRETORIA 4105

Classified By: Ambassador Eric M. Bost. Reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. Advisors to ANC Deputy President Jacob Zuma are confident that their candidate will defeat ANC President Thabo Mbeki at the December 16-20 national conference, although they acknowledge that Mbeki may yet have "tricks up his sleeve." Mbeki is trying to buy delegate votes, the Zuma camp alleges. They are advising their delegates to "take the money" and vote for Zuma anyway, relying on the secrecy of the ballot. They acknowledge that the lack of women in Zuma's leadership slate (only one of six) is a weakness, but believe the support of the ANC Women's League partially protects Zuma from gender-based attacks. ForMin Dlamini-Zuma's decision to side with President Mbeki as his candidate for party deputy president -- and refuse the Zuma camp nomination as party chairman -- is nothing more than an ambitious play to become the country's next president, according to one Zuma advisor. The Zuma camp also claims that the negative attacks on Zuma are backfiring, and they have begun their own public campaign to highlight Zuma's leadership strengths and vision for the country. Zuma's recent travel to India, the U.K., and the U.S. was designed to keep him "above the fray" and protect him from difficult policy questions in the lead-up to the election. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) Three close allies of African National Congress (ANC) Deputy President Jacob Zuma met with CG Durban and PolOff December 4-6 to share their views on Zuma's campaign to become ANC President at the party's December 16-20 national congress in Polokwane, Limpopo. CG Durban met 04 December with Don Mkhwanazi, Chairman of the Friends of Jacob Zuma Trust and prominent KwaZulu-Natal businessman, and 05 December with Willies Mchunu, Speaker of the KwaZulu-Natal Legislature and Provincial Chairman of the South African Communist Party. PolOff met 05 December with Mo Shaik, close advisor to Zuma and former diplomat and ANC intelligence operative (ref A).

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Zuma Confident, but Cautious  
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[1](#)3. (C) The Zuma camp is confident that their candidate will win at the ANC conference in Polokwane. Both Mkhwanazi and Mchunu believe that Zuma might even increase his support over the provincial voting results (ref B). Although upbeat, the Zuma camp remains cautious about declaring victory at this stage. Mbeki is keen to protect his legacy, Mkhwanazi said,

and a defeat in Limpopo would be viewed as a "humiliation." Mbeki may yet have "tricks up his sleeve," which is why the Zuma camp is working hard to stay in touch with their delegates. Shaik has rented a house in Polokwane, which will serve as the Zuma "campaign headquarters" and key Zuma lieutenants, including Shaik and Mkhwanazi, will each have a list of delegates to track closely.

14. (C) Shaik and Mkhwanazi both reported that Mbeki supporters are attempting to "buy" the support of ANC delegates. Mkhwanazi recounted the story of a pro-Zuma delegate in Newcastle who was offered Rand 50,000 (approximately USD 7,500) to support Mbeki. Mkhwanazi told the delegate to take the money, play it safe, and know that his vote is secret, no matter what. There are reports that "buyers" of votes want proof of the votes in the form of cell phone photos of the ballot paper marked with the right candidate. As a result of these rumors, Mkhwanazi has suggested that cell phones should be banned in the polling place at the conference.

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Gender Politics Issue for Zuma  
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15. (C) Shaik acknowledged that Mbeki will try to play the "gender card" against Zuma, pointing out that the Zuma camp has only one woman candidate among the top six leadership positions (Parliamentary Speaker Mbete as Deputy Secretary General). (NOTE: The Mbeki camp has three women among its top six: ForMin Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma for ANC Deputy President, Public Works Minister Thoko Didiza as Deputy Secretary-General, and Deputy President Phumzile

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Mlambo-Ngcuka as Treasurer General. END NOTE.) However, Shaik believes the support of the ANC Women's League helps

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insulate Zuma from gender-based attacks. Commenting on ForMin Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma decision to decline the nomination of the Zuma camp to become party chairman (ref C), Shaik said that Dlamini-Zuma was "nakedly ambitious" and wanted to become president. The path to power was through Mbeki by becoming his party deputy in December and thus the obvious candidate for the national presidency in the 2009 elections.

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Mbeki's Negative Campaign Backfiring  
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16. (C) Mbeki's negative campaign against Zuma has largely backfired, according to the three advisors. KwaZulu-Natal Speaker Mchunu claimed that ANC Chairman DefMin Mosiuoa Lekota's attacks on Zuma -- reviving the allegations of corruption and claiming that Zuma asked to be fired as Deputy President -- were a mistake and have helped the Zuma camp. Shaik noted that Zuma has suffered from years of negative publicity, and yet Zuma remained popular throughout the country. Repeating the same allegations at this late date will not work.

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Zuma Camp Going on Offensive  
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17. (C) The Zuma camp has initiated an aggressive and coordinated public relations campaign to make the case for Zuma's candidacy, according to Shaik.

-- Mo Shaik himself did a lengthy interview with the weekly 07 December Mail & Guardian ("We won't topple Mbeki") which attempted to reassure observers that the Zuma administration would follow mainstream economic policies and not take

revenge on Mbeki and his supporters. Shaik observed that FinMin Trevor Manuel could have a "great role" in a Zuma administration if he was "flexible." (NOTE: Manuel responded in a sarcastic "open letter" printed in 09 December Sunday newspapers, calling Shaik's comments "exceedingly arrogant and gratuitous" and noting that Shaik was not among the list of candidates for ANC National Executive Council (ref C). END NOTE.)

-- Angie Motshekga, Gauteng provincial education head, argued in the 08 December Weekender newspaper ("The leader of the ordinary people") that Zuma is the "best placed senior leader" who has the "absolute confidence of the ordinary people to do the best thing for the nation."

-- Siphwe Nyanda, former head of the South African National Defence Force, criticized Mbeki allies for the negative campaigning against Zuma in an 09 December Sunday Times op-ed entitled "The behavior of some of the protagonists in the contest seems to suggest an apocalypse should Zuma win...".

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Foreign Travel Timed to Keep Zuma Above Fray  
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18. (C) Asked about why Jacob Zuma traveled to the United Kingdom, India, and the United States in the period leading up to the ANC conference (Zuma returned to South Africa 08 December), Shaik claimed that Zuma's decision to travel internationally was part of a strategy to keep him "above the fray" in the lead-up to the ANC conference. If Zuma was in the country, he might have felt that he had to respond to personal attacks, such as Lekota's. By being abroad, Zuma was able to let proxies answer the charges. Zuma would have also been asked policy questions, such as on the recent interest rate hike, Zimbabwe, and other issues. These questions would put Zuma in a no-win situation, Shaik claimed. If he answers "I follow ANC policy," journalists will attack Zuma for being shallow. If Zuma answers Qwill attack Zuma for being shallow. If Zuma answers honestly, he will be accused of freelancing and ignoring ANC directives.

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Comment  
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19. (C) Mkhwanazi, Mchunu, and Shaik are close to Zuma, and we believe their views reflect those of the Zuma camp. The fact that they are not yet ready to declare victory for their man demonstrates that Mbeki, always the shrewd political strategist, continues to work the delegate field in an attempt regain the political momentum. We do not count Mbeki

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out. Yet, with less than a week to go before the ANC national conference, there is little doubt that Mbeki faces an uphill battle to defeat the popular and increasingly confident Zuma.

110. (U) This cable was drafted in coordination with Consulate Durban.  
BOST